



Fruits & Veggies – More Matters™

Insights on the Consumption Gap and How Best to Address It

According to the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005*, people who consume generous amounts of fruits and vegetables as part of a healthful diet are likely to have reduced risk of chronic diseases, including stroke and perhaps other cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer. Also, as part of a healthy diet, eating fruits and vegetables instead of high-fat foods may make it easier to control your weight. You may also feel full on fewer calories. That's because most fruits and vegetables are lower in calories and higher in fiber than other foods.

Research by Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH) has found that the general public is aware of the health benefits of fruit and vegetable consumption. That said, while fruit and vegetable intake has increased over the years, the rate of this increase is very low. In fact, at the current rate, it would take over a century to close the consumption gap.

The Consumption Gap

There is a large gap between how many fruits and veggies people know they should eat and how many they actually do eat. To meet new dietary guidelines, most consumers need to at least double the amount they currently consume in order to meet new federal recommendations contained within the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005*.

- More than 50 percent of consumers know that they need five or more servings of fruits and vegetables every day (PBH and ACNielsen, *State of the Plate, 2005*)
- More than 90 percent of adult consumers do not eat the dietary guidelines recommended amount of fruits and vegetables (unpublished data CDC)
- 96 percent of children 2 to 12 years of age fall short of the recommended 2-5 cups per day, the amount of which depends on their age, sex, and activity level (*State of the Plate, 2005*)

Families with Children in the Forefront of Those Consuming Least Amounts of Fruits & Veggies

Improvement in intake is needed for virtually everyone. Although the frequency of fruit and vegetable consumption is similar for both sexes, men generally consume larger portions than women. However, the gap between minimum recommendations and actual intake is similar for adult men and women.

- The 64 percent of consumers who are eating less than four servings per day are families with children, especially those with younger kids or single parent households, kids aged 2-12, teenage girls and females younger than 45 (*State of the Plate, 2005*)
 - Only 14 percent of families with children reach five or more servings of fruits and veggies per day (*State of the Plate, 2005*)
 - Those who are more likely to consume five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day are married seniors, males over 45, females over 65 and teen boys (*State of the Plate, 2005*)
 - Fruit and vegetable consumption is similar for most body mass index (BMI) groupings. Adults who are obese consume eight percent fewer fruit and vegetable servings than
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those who are under, normal or overweight. The percent of adults consuming five or more servings per day drops as weight increases (*State of the Plate, 2005*.)

What Will It Take to Support More Fruit and Vegetable Consumption?

Consumers tend to agree that health benefits motivate them to include more fruits and veggies in their family's diets. In a recent PBH online survey of moms ages 24-41, eighty-eight (88) percent of respondents agreed that just knowing that diets rich in fruits and vegetables promotes their families' overall health and may prevent disease encourages them to serve more fruits and veggies. Eighty-seven (87) percent found the fact that more fruits and veggies can help prevent obesity as motivational. Moms who were surveyed also emphasized their need for practical, easy to use information and resources if they are to succeed in introducing more fruits and veggies into their family's diet. Moms' top 10 list (*PBH custom online survey, 2006*):

- #1 – Fast, simple recipes and serving suggestions
- #2 – Tips on how different forms of fruits and vegetables can fit into family mealtimes
- #3 – Ideas on including fruits and veggies on a tight budget
- #4 – Access to pre-cut fruits and veggies
- #5 – Tips from other moms on how to introduce more at mealtimes
- #6 – Advice from experts
- #7 – Preparation tips (cutting, slicing correctly)
- #8 – A better understanding of the wide variety available
- #9 – Information on health benefits of fruits and vegetables
- #10 – Reminders to eat more fruits and veggies

In the same survey, some tips suggested by mothers to get their families to eat more fruits & veggies include:

- Introducing new fruits and vegetables into children's diets when they are young
- Preparing them in advance so they are handy to grab as a snack
- Being a role model and eating them yourself
- Adding them to other food dishes that kids love
- Limiting unhealthy snacks in the household
- Trying different things
- Allowing children to choose the kinds of fruits and vegetables they eat

According to the 2005 PBH *State of the Plate* survey, consumers' increased awareness also leads to an increase in overall consumption. In that survey, consumers cite news media as their top sources for information on the health benefits of fruits and vegetables. The top three information sources cited are:

- Books and magazines (74%)
 - Newspapers (49%)
 - TV/radio (46%)
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